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ABSTRACT

Theories and quantitative studies were reviewed to address the issue of what promotes adaptive behavior development in very young children. Attention is given to the interactionist theories of Robert R. Sears, Eric H. Erikson, David Elkind, and Burton White. Commonalities among theorists are delineated in terms of stages, child rearing practices, common ideas, mothering characteristics that enhance development, and child rearing practices that enhance development. Even though the four theorists view child development from different perspectives, they agree about many aspects. The theorists agree on these points: (1) the early years are crucial years for emotional and intellectual development; (2) the most significant person in the life of the child is the mother, or primary caregiver; and (3) the environment plays a significant role in the growth and development of the child. All the theorists emphasize the need to match the environment with the maturing child by designing experiences which are relevant to the child's understanding. (RH)

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Selected Theories of Child Development
and the
Effect of the Caregiver on Very Young Children

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(Taken from the Theory Section of F.S.U. Dissertation)

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Abstract

The main reason for this research inquiry of a review of theories was to determine what independent variables are assumed to be related to adaptive behavior development, the dependent variable. The intent was to review selected child development theories as they relate to the role of the caregiver. The researcher has presented the views of four Interactionists theorists which form the foundation for this article. In this writing differences and likenesses are discussed. There are overlapping areas between the theories. Mothering characteristics and childrearing practices that enhance a child's development are listed from the theories of the following Interactionists: Robert R. Sears, Erik Erikson, David Elkind, and Burton White.

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Theories and quantitative studies were reviewed to address the broad issue of what promotes adaptive behavior development in very young children. Part of this answer lies in the body of child development theories. The task was to find the theories which speak to child development during the preschool years. Only those theories which were scientific in method were selected, rather than those with philosophical emphasis. The Interactionist group serves as a basis for general associations of variables emphasized by the four theorists. The theories are presented in chronological order within the group. In this way the expansion and growth of ideas is perceived.

Interactionist Theories

Interactionists think of development not as unfolding, but coming about through active transactions with the environment. Growth, to Interactionists, involves progression through increasingly complex engagements in the environment. The following theorists represent the Interactionists: Robert R. Sears, Erik Erikson, David Elkind, and Burton White.

Robert R. Sears. The essence of Sears' theory is that development depends upon the dyadic interaction between the caring adult, usually the mother, and the child. He concludes that the mother's social status, education, and cultural background

predetermine her childrearing practices. As a result, Sears surveys child development primarily as a mirror of childrearing practices built upon innate drives which are modified by the socializing environment. Sears, Maccoby, and Levine (1957) see reason to examine the behavior of the mother to determine if there are consistent consequences of different practices. They emphasize that both the mother and childrearing practices are responsible for personality characteristics of the child (Sears, 1950a, 1951; Sears et al., 1957), and that childrearing practices themselves are products of cultural factors operating in the mother's life. The child's first interpersonal experiences are with the mother, mainly, and the immediate family. Once the child's original biological drives are modified, acquired motives begin to direct his or her behavior. The mother's, or caregiver's, talking, hugging, smiling, and surroundings become a reward to the child. Children develop a need for these rewards quite apart from their need for food. Love or desired objects and situations become things to strive for and attain.

Sears et al. (1957) present clinical studies showing a number of causal relationships between mothers' childrearing practices and the behavior of their children. One of the most influential things in training is the way the mother disciplines the child in her effort to get rid of aggressive behavior (Sears, 1941, 1950b, 1961; Sears & Whiting, 1953) and establish more mature forms of action. Another

important aspect of mother behavior is her degree of tolerance for changeworthy behavior--changeworthy meaning unacceptable behaviors, and attitudes in need of improvement. The severity of various techniques of eliminating changeworthy behavior is important also. Furthermore, the temperamental qualities of the mother herself are important. The positive inculcation of more mature behavior to replace the undesirable behavior is of utmost importance.

According to Sears et al. (1957), specific qualities of caregivers which facilitate adaptive behavior development include the following: (a) good temperament in the caregiver, (b) a natural enjoyment of the child in talking, hugging, and smiling during one-to-one interactions, and (c) a great deal of talking between caregiver and child with caregiver selecting words and phrases suitable to the child.

Erik H. Erikson. Erikson (1936, 1968), stresses psycho-social development of children. Erikson (1950), a neo-Freudian, emphasizes the phases, or stages, of development a child proceeds through to become a self-actualizing adult. The stages are as follows: (1) trust vs. mistrust, (2) autonomy vs. shame and doubt, (3) initiative vs. guilt, and (4) industry vs. inferiority. The degree to which a child progresses successfully through each stage determines the well-being, as well as the possibility of future growth to the next stage. To Erikson (1956), the personality is not a fixed entity but is constantly changing.

The first childhood phase includes trust vs. mistrust. This phase is highly concerned with the infant's relationship with the mother or primary caregiver. Establishing the necessary trust during this stage requires successful caregiving to the infant. This phase covers the age period from birth to one year. The next phase, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, is highly related to the caregiver's ability to allow the child to assume responsibilities and tasks appropriate to his or her current growth stage. As the child progresses through to the next stage, he or she acquires initiative vs. guilt according to the degree of success during this phase. Erikson points to the importance of the mother in guiding the child from one stage to the next. Parents must have certain ways of guiding by prohibition and permission (Erikson, 1950). The mother must be able to project to the child a conviction that there is meaning in what parents are doing, as they relate to the child.

Erikson (1946, 1950) writes that each successive stage and its accompanying crises have a special relation to the basic elements of society for the simple reason that the human life cycle and man's institutions have evolved together. Trust vs. mistrust emerges as the touchstone of organized religion. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt emerges as a stage for the ratio of love and hate, cooperation and willfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression. From a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem comes a lasting sense of good will and pride. The initiative vs. guilt stage adds to autonomy the quality of undertaking, planning, and attacking a task for the sake of being active; initiative is a part of every act. The

danger of this stage is a sense of guilt over the over-ambitious goals beyond the capacity of the organism.

Specific qualities of caregivers which facilitate adaptive behavior development according to Erikson (1950) include the following: (a) consistent, loving caregiving, (b) freedom of expression, (c) self-control without loss of self-esteem, and (d) tasks provided within ability of child.

David Elkind. Elkind (1978) writes that children vary in ability to adapt to new and changing situations. Their difficulties are largely biological and the environment should be matched to the child's developing capabilities.

Elkind states, concerning the first two years of life, that it is one of the most remarkable and significant eras in the whole life cycle. Within two short years, a swaddling, uncoordinated bundle of wants is transformed into a walking, talking individual with strong social attachments and a will of his or her own. During the first two years the relationship between infant with physical needs and caregiver plays a vital role in the outcome of transforming the infant into a progressing individual (Elkind, 1969; 1978).

Infancy is also a period of extreme vulnerability, says Elkind (1978, 1979). Newborn infants are exposed, for the first time, to a totally new environment and are susceptible to a variety of diseases. Infants are also vulnerable because they cannot care for themselves and must depend upon caregivers. Infants are also socially vulnerable. Without the necessary minimum of love and physical mothering, the delicate, budding sense of self-worth and trust in

others will be badly damaged. This self-worth and trust relates to Erikson's theoretical stage of trust vs. mistrust.

Elkind reports that when the infant is about a month old, the mother begins to establish eye contact. This eye contact seems to promote a peculiar chemistry that makes the mother feel she is relating and communicating to another individual.

Toward the end of the first year and into the second, Elkind says the young infant evidences the new concept of the self as object. The fear of strangers manifests itself at this time, reflecting the infant's ability to discriminate between unfamiliar and familiar faces, and also to apprehend danger to the self. The concept of self as object is the foundation upon which all later components of the self-concept are built and about which they are all organized.

Furthermore, Elkind (1978, 1979) writes that the parent-child-family scenario is conditioned by social pressure. Parental emancipation and democratic attitudes of the parents, as well as the encouragement of early competence, can be determining factors in success or difficulty. Working mothers require that children soon learn that they are not the center of the universe. Consequently, the early emancipation of children can have a negative influence. When parents regard children as emotionally independent, they weigh their own needs and the child's needs differently than when parents regard children as dependent upon the parent for their needs.

Elkind (1979) states that the willingness of mothers to put their children in daycare centers reflects a new middle-class attitude toward children and childrearing. Children are never as emotionally

independent as parents would like them to be. The real danger in contemporary society is taking the emotional maturity of the child for granted. The parent-child difficulty is itself conditioned by social pressure. The family is a link in the chain of causation in emotional illness; it is not necessarily the anchor from which that chain ascends.

Specific qualities of caregivers which facilitate adaptive behavior development, according to Elkind (1978), include the following: (a) consistent, loving caregiving, (b) eye contact which is the chemistry for communicating and relating, (c) a familiar face during fear-of-strangers stage, (d) allowing a child-centered universe (Elkind, 1979), (e) not forcing early emancipation of the child from social pressure, or the mother's working, (f) matching environment to child's biological adaptability, and (g) providing opportunities for tasks within child's ability.

Burton White. White (1972, 1975, 1977) writes that simple everyday activities are important for forming the foundation of experiences on which all later development depends. Social skills and attitudes are formed before age two, for example. White and Watts (1973) studied the development of overall competence in children seeking to learn to structure the experience in development of adaptive abilities.

From eight months to two years the child develops socially (White, 1975, 1977). He believes that after two years it is too late to look at the development of social skills and attitudes. He

recommends designing childrearing experiences specifically to match the child's rapidly changing interests and abilities.

White stresses the special importance of the one to eighteen month period for the development of general competence. This period forces a test of the family's capacity to rear children, with the primary burden falling upon the mother. This competence will be discussed further in the upcoming section on childrearing practices.

Babies reveal a growing awareness of themselves as separate identities somewhere near the end of the first year of life, which is largely shaped through social interactions with the primary caregiver (White & Watts, 1973). These interchanges appear to shape the infant's orientation toward people generally. The child typically shows a strong orienting tendency toward the mother.

White and Watts (1973) reveal that there are at least three major sets of choices for a mother in regard to childrearing practices during this period. The first choice becomes necessary as locomobility evolves into crawling. The result of crawling is potential for self-injury, destructiveness, clutter, and intrusion into the privacy of others which must be coped with. The choices made by the mother in handling situations vary widely and seem to link with subsequent developments in the child. The second choice for mothers emerges with language acquisition. Some mothers talk a great deal to their children, while others are less skilled in selection of words and phrases suitable to the child. The third major effect of fundamental childrearing practices appears at the onset of negativism at about 14 to 15 months of age, which proves stressful in varying

degrees to all mothers. This age brings ignoring, testing, rejections, and related conflicts; stress occurs when these things are combined with the natural curiosity and increased mobility. The disappearance of a benign, easy-to-get-along-with 12 month old brings varying styles of reaction, varying from the overpunitive to the overacquiescent mother.

The mother's direct and indirect actions with her one to three year old, especially during the second year, are the most powerful formative factors in the development of a preschool child (White, 1972; White & Watts, 1973). Much of the quality of the entire life of an individual is determined by the mother's actions during these two years. A mother need not have a high school education, says White, nor very substantial economic assets, and even a good job of parenting can be accomplished without a father in the home. For example, a mother's direct and indirect actions reveal importance in such choices as accepting the idea that a child and a spotless home are incompatible. Successful mothers seem to be more inclined to take risks on safety measures, rather than reduce the normal curiosity and development. Successful mothers seem to derive a great deal of pleasure from their own children, giving generous measures of attention and consideration simply as part of a natural way of life. Mothers make children feel as though what they are doing is interesting.

White (White, 1972, 1977; White & Watts, 1973) writes further concerning things that mothers do which have ultimate consequences on the developing child. Mothers provide access to many objects and

diverse situations. They reassure the child that he or she can expect help and encouragement most of, but not all the time. Things are demonstrated and explained to the child, but mostly on the child's instigation rather than on the instigation of the mother. Mothers prohibit certain activities firmly and consistently. They are secure enough to say "no" from time to time without feeling the child will not love them. Mother's imagination, making interesting associations and suggestions to the child when opportunities arise, seems to be an important quality. Skillfully and naturally the mother strengthens the child's intrinsic motivation to learn. The child is also given a sense of task orientation, a notion that it is desirable to do things well. The child feels secure in general.

The effective mother, White (White & Watts, 1973) writes further, does not devote the bulk of the day to rearing the young child. Most are far too busy to do so; some have part-time jobs. What they seem to do is to perform excellently the functions of designer and consultant. The mother designs the activities of the day according to her discretion and according to her available provisions. The mother acts as a consultant to the child as she answers questions and guides responses offered by the child. The mother designs the physical home beautifully suited to nurturing the burgeoning curiosity. The home is full of small, manipulative, visually detailed objects. It contains things to climb, available materials to nurture more mature motor interests. It contains a rich variety of interesting things.

White (White, 1972; White & Watts, 1973) believes that the successful mother, being largely responsible for setting up the

environment the child has, sets up guides for the child's behavior and is generally permissive and indulgent. She encourages the vast majority of his or her explorations. When the child encounters a difficult or an interesting situation, he or she turns to the mother for help. Mother is usually nearby, although working, and most often the child is responded to by the mother, who shares the enthusiasm; sometimes the mother shares an interesting related idea. These ten- to thirty-second interchanges are oriented around the child's interest of the moment. These effective mothers do not always drop what they are doing to attend to the child's request, but rather the mother says the time is inconvenient when it is obviously inconvenient. Episodes of such mother and child interchanges probably give the child a realistic, small taste of things to come.

White and Watts (1973) reveal that, during the second year of life the child seems to be learning a great deal about his or her mother and her reactions. The child studies her, approaches her often during this period, and seems to develop a very strong attachment to her. Other human beings count, but not much compared to the mother. Peers spend very small amounts of time with the child. Fathers may spend more time than we are aware of, but they still probably do not compare with the mother as centers of continuing interest.

White identified some specific qualities of caregivers which facilitate adaptive behavior development, including the following: (a) forming affiliative attachments, (b) talking a great deal, selecting words and phrases suitable to child's understanding, (c) tolerance for clutter, destructiveness, and intrusion of privacy to a

degree during crawling stages, and (d) coping with child's negativism.

Commonalities Among Theorists

Stages. The theorists reviewed shared commonalities, as well as differences in terms of stages, or phases, of development. There appeared to be universality of the stages, regardless of socioeconomic status or race. In order to see clearly what these theorists generally shared in common about stages of development, the following ideas emerged. Theorists such as Erikson (1968), Elkind (1978), and White (White, 1975; White & Watts, 1973) wrote concerning these stages.

White (1975) said social skills and attitudes were formed before age two, and he emphasized the need to design experiences to match specifically the child's interests and abilities. Elkind (1978) also stressed matching the environment to the child's developing capabilities. He called the infancy period, especially the first two years, the stage where strong social attachments are formed. Erikson (1968) believed that the degree to which a child progresses from one stage into the next determined the psycho-social development of the child. He further indicated a built-in belief in the child's progressing through stages during the early childhood years. However, only Erikson established a clear-cut list of progressing stages, or phases. Each theorist, however, identified the important stages during which social development occurred.

Elkind (1978) emphasized the infancy period as socially vulnerable, and without love and mothering, the self-worth and trust can be damaged. This period related to Erikson's (1968) stage of

trust vs. mistrust. White (White, 1975; White & Watts, 1973) and Elkind (1978) also stressed the social development.

White (1975) and Erikson (1968) individually emphasized the basic foundation laid during the early months through the first years for later development. Elkind (1978) identified the concept of self as object as being fundamental upon which all later components of the self-concept are built, and about which they are all organized. This concept could also apply to the theory of Erikson (1968).

Childrearing practices. What did each theorist presume about childrearing practices and their impact on human development? Several theorists spoke on this issue.

Erikson (1968) emphasized in the trust vs. mistrust stage the urgent need of the infant for a satisfying relationship with the mother. The need to develop feelings of comfort from a consistent caregiver promoted the sense of trust in Erikson's theory. Elkind (1978) also emphasized the mothering in establishing the child's self-worth and trust in others.

Sears et al. (1957) provided guidance in what behaviors are best in childrearing. Sears wrote that influential aspects of the mother's behavior in the child's training included the following: (1) the way she disciplined to get rid of changeworthy behaviors; (2) the degree of tolerance for changeworthy behavior; (3) the severity of techniques applied; (4) the mother's temperamental qualities, attitudes, values, and upbringing; and (5) the positive inculcation of more mature behavior to replace the changeworthy behavior.

White (White & Watts, 1973) related ideas similar to ideas of Sears, as follows: (1) a degree of tolerance for clutter, destructiveness, and intrusion of privacy when locomobility emerged in crawling, and (2) a coping attitude during the stressful negativism of the 14-15 month period.

Common ideas. These theorists tend to agree on the following three ideas:

1. The early years are critical years of a child's life in terms of his or her growth and development emotionally and intellectually.
2. The most significant person in the life of the child, a vital ingredient during these early years, is the mother, or the primary caregiver.
3. The environment plays a significant role in the growth and development of the child. All theories stress the need of matching the environment with the maturing child by designing experiences which are relevant to the child's understanding.

In order to arrive at the major ideas among the selected theories concerning early childhood development and growth, an attempt to state the major concepts of theorists will follow. There appears to be agreement on three ideas in many instances: relevant stages (Erikson), matching environment to developing capabilities (Elkind), and designing experiences to match changing interests and abilities (White). Each theorist points to the idea of crucial times in the mother-child relationship (Erikson, Sears, Elkind, and White). Each points to that personal relationship with the primary caregiver, usually the mother.

In relating the above-mentioned general statements of theorists to specific parenting behaviors, two important questions evolve concerning (a) the specific mothering characteristics that enhance a child's development, and (b) the specific childrearing practices which help a child develop positively. To pinpoint specific characteristics given by the various theorists, a list will follow. The list reveals answers to the two questions which evolved from the theories. The questions are the following: (1) What do mothers, or caregivers, do to enhance the growth of the child in a positive manner; and (2) what do mothers, or caregivers, do to hinder the growth of the child's development?

Mothering Characteristics that Enhance Development

1. Trust emerging from consistent, loving caregiving during the birth to one-year period (Erikson, 1950).
2. Simple day in and day out caring and enjoying the child as another human being (Erikson, 1950).
3. Mother herself displaying good temperament (Sears et al., 1957).
4. Mothers talking a great deal, selecting words and phrases suitable to the child, and thereby aiding their language acquisition (White & Watts, 1973).
5. Mother's talking, hugging, smiling becomes a reward to the child. The child develops a need for these things, apart from their need for food. Loved objects become a thing to strive for and attain (Sears et al., 1957).

6. Mother giving the necessary minimum of love and physical mothering to establish a budding sense of self-worth and trust in others (Elkind, 1978).

7. Establishing eye contact at about a month old, promoting a peculiar chemistry, encouraging communication and relating between mother and infant (Elkind, 1978).

8. Providing a familiar face during fear-of-strangers age, during the end of the first year and into the second, allowing for child's concept of the self as object--developing into a positive self-concept (Elkind, 1978).

9. Mothers allowing child to be center of the universe, and not forcing early emancipation from social pressures or work (Elkind, 1979).

10. Mother's matching the environment to the child's biological adaptability (Elkind, 1978).

Childrearing Practices that Enhance Development

1. Allowing freedom of expression, self-control without loss of self-esteem, giving a sense of good will and pride (Erikson, 1950).

2. Providing opportunities for undertaking, planning, attacking a task within the ability of the child, resulting in initiative (Erikson, 1950).

3. Tolerating changeworthy behavior (Sears et al., 1957).

4. Inculcating positively more mature behavior to replace the undesirable behavior (Sears et al., 1957).

5. Tolerating a degree of clutter, destructiveness, and intrusion of the privacy of others when locomobility emerges in crawling (White & Watts, 1973).

6. Coping with the stress of negativism in the 14 to 15 month period aids the child (White & Watts, 1973).

Concluding Remarks Regarding the Theories

Even though these theorists look at the phenomena of child development from different viewpoints, they are in agreement on many aspects. Specific agreements include the following: critical times and the personal relationship with the primary caregiver, usually the mother. It must be remembered that a child is a multidimensional being and that no one theory covers all dimensions sufficiently. Specific ages of critical times sometimes differ over several months from one theorist to another. The psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains of behavior are not independent of one another.

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